

EARTH WITH HER BARS

EDITH DART

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EARTH WITH HER BARS

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

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To E. M. B.

FRIEND ! among these pages find
Memories many of days entwined
Closely with our friendship true.
What more fitting than to you
I should give them, who may read
'Neath faltering word the living deed ?

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E. D.

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“Earth with her bars was about
me for ever”

JONAH II. 6

I CRIED, “God, set me free, break down earth bars
And let my soul mount upward to the stars.
Earth is too small, ’tis heaven that I would gain,
Why must these bars perpetually restrain ?
But loose all bonds, then might I rise and go,
Leaving world mists for some supernal snow
Where human things to nothingness must shrink,
Dropping unwanted at heaven’s utmost brink.

God said, “To heaven, thou, whom I made for
earth ?

Between the narrow gates of death and birth
Can’st thou not spend the brief and reckoned space
Without a scorn of thy fair dwelling-place ?
What would’st in heaven with thy poor human toys
Of sense and passion, tears, regrets and joys ?
In heaven such are as playthings laid aside ;
Of these bereft hast aught to keep beside ?

Earth is my handiwork, I joyed therein :
If thou as well it therefore were no sin.
Each flowing river, laughing brook and rill
Holds in its depths my pleasure’s echo still.
The west wind sighs it and the south replies ;
Dawn is as wondrous now as when Eve’s eyes

First smiled to see how fair a thing I planned—
This simple sunlight o'er a morning land.
The moving seas breathe low the same refrain
To creek and bay : by wood and grassy plain,
All unafraid toward the distant skies
Flowers lift their child-like, happy, open eyes ;
While birds' glad hearts pour out in constant song
From morn to eve in one orchestra long.

Yet thou, from this glad earth, would'st be set free :
Fashioned for earth, wrought out of it by me ?
From the dust made, thou, crying for the stars,
Would'st taunt me with earth's bars ? "

I said, " Nay, lord ! Thou dost not hear aright.
All these thy things are goodly in my sight.
And, hadst thou made me as a bird or flower,
I had sung, smiled, content with this my dower.
But thou didst fashion me, not all of dust.
I am not only earth-born, with earth lust :
I bear within me, what I cannot tell.
But thou, who wrought'st it, know'st if it be well
Or evil. I know neither, I but ask
Thy meaning of this earth-wove, heaven-pierced
mask
Of men called Life ? "

I woke and was alone.
Could I have borne God's answer to have known ?

The Kingdom of God

I SOUGHT for God by all means, everywhere ;
Through creed of man, by Litany and prayer.

Through weary nights and days, by plea and cry,
Sought without finding, faithless, hopeless I.

Till, as a baffled bird with broken wing,
My soul returned from fruitless journeying.

When, at faith's ebb, a sudden message burned—
“ Within and not without, God is discerned.

Look deep, within thyself. There find thy goal
For ever shrined—God in thine own soul.”

The Voice

IN the eerie hours of morning
When the fires of life burn slow,
Inmost heart to heart speaks plainly,
Poignantly and very low.

In the cold, grey hours of dawning,
When heart cannot choose but hear,
Through the dream-like hush of waiting,
Unseen things draw very near.

Of the body scarcely conscious,
Fleshly barriers 'fined away :
Spirit unto spirit answers,
Freed awhile from house of clay.

Love and Life

YEA ! this is love, no less than this—
Not to receive and give love's kiss
Alone, but her sharp wounds to bear :
To let the sword pierce there ! and there !
And say no word, but still to smile
Feeling life ebb out all the while :
To keep unspoken, let none know,
That love beside joy bringeth woe,
Joy's sister ever, never far ;
'These love's most certain duties are.

If love be thus, why seek it all
Who tread life's way and bear life's thrall ?

Yea ! verily, thou askest why.
None ever lived who might reply—
Save only this, that love and life
Are severed but by utmost strife :
Few be so strong to wrest away
Life from love's holding—even they,
Who disentangle, still are fain
To know not joy but life's fierce pain.
As petals from some fair rose torn,
Life without love is life forlorn.

"Inquietum est cor nostrum
donec requiescat in te"

S. AUGUSTINE

O'ER my bewildered spirit falls
The grey eve's peace : its shadowy palls
Cling close about the brooding hills :
And gently, surely, evening fills
My restless, aching, human sense
With healing balsam : coming whence
I know not, only 'neath its spell
My heart, too dumb its hurt to tell,
Sinks to some far soul-haunt of peace,
Where heart ills find a swift release,
Where hides a lapping, homelike balm
Familiar, of passing calm.
And, when a way beset is trod
Again, a voice cries—"This was God."

A Quiet Pool

MAN's soul is as some quiet pool
Where drooping willows low,
And boughs of aspen green and cool
Around the margin grow.

They shut out glancing, clear sun ray,
That baffled passes by :
Here only dusky shadows stay
Faint mirrored from the sky.

Thick trees hang close about the brim,
No bird e'er breaks them through.
The waters glimmer ghostly, dim,
Motionless, soundless too.

Footstep nor voice is ever known,
No song borne light on air
About that quiet pool alone—
With willows bending there.

Va-et-Vient

OH ! world invisible, sometimes so near
Thou seem'st to draw, that in mine ear
Soundest thy voice, drowning this throng
Of human tumult, shrill and strong.
And listening, I have peace and smile
At earth's blind tangle solved awhile.

Thy voices die : later, in vain
I strain mine ears for one refrain,
For vaguest echo, lightest breath
Of the Unknown : empty as death,
A silent void it closes round.
But mine appeal the only sound.

Oh ! world invisible, am I
Deaf, art thou silent ? To my cry
Comes but the echo—thou or I ?

Balance

MUST man with pain surrender bliss ?
And, with the throe, yield even this,
Quick throb of joy, the piercing sense
Of unseen beauty, far and hence ;
Of which the seen is as moonlight
To noontide sunflood, full and bright ?

Can there but ransom sure be bought
From agony, by keeping naught :
Emptying life of feeling bare
Till it lie void and vacant there,
Senseless alike under blow or kiss,
Whisper of passion or scourge's hiss ?

And deep springs the answer—" Even so,
Man barter joy to relinquish woe.
And he who shrinks from pain's payment dies,
Though never earth's sod yet upon him lies."

In Memoriam :
Sir Redvers Buller, V.C.

HERO of many fights, none vanquisheth
The ultimate foe, attacking death.
Here never warfare conquers, for no man
These shadowy outposts may victorious scan.
Certain thou enterest on this campaign drear
With a heroic soul that knew not fear
Nor any weakling passion, since life gave
Thee courage beyond most, bravest of brave.

And England now, on thy still breast, would lay,
Not just the fading wreaths of earthly bay,
Nor spoken honours of the world's glib praise,
Thou sought'st of no man through thine earthly
ways ;
But England's tears, up-welling from the heart,
In which love, sorrow, honour, each bear part.

“To Aileen—Dead at Six Years”

“What need’st thou with earth’s wheel?”

RABBI BEN EZRA

A LITTLE cup
Wherefrom to sup
Refreshment day by day—
So tender wrought,
The potter’s thought
Expressed in childish clay.

Not a vase of grace,
Stately and chased,
With sculptures and inlay—
Given a rare place,
Lest use deface
The perfect, classic way ;

But a simple bowl,
Body and soul
One, in its meek array
The potter then,
Mistrusting men
Should break—or time decay—
Himself took up
This little cup—
Safe and unflawed to stay.

“Più senta il bene, e così la
doglienza”

INFERNO, Canto VI.

WINE-RED 'neath the sun
Ploughed fields lay ;
Empty as life done
Or love away.

Black stretched woods behind,
Clouds overhead ;
Crept a wailing wind,
Sore plaint it said.

Wide sky, wine-red earth,
What can ye tell
Of death or of birth,
Love and pangs of hell ?

Greater is man than ye,
Though heart-sick to go,
Since he bears misery
Conscious of woe.

Awakening

Now from her long Winter sleep, Mother Earth
turns to awake :

Stir of new life in the woods, green of young grass
o'er the brake,

Movement through covert and copse, rise of the sap
in the tree.

Red shine elm boughs in the sun, bourgeoning life
there to be.

Quick beats the pulse of all life : one are we, Nature
and man.

Flow follows ebb in the wave, so is the seasons' wise
plan.

After quiescence and sleep, come again effort and
zest.

Good is life's urgent desire, springing from torpor
and rest.

Roused from stupor now Earth smiles in young
vigour and strife :

As from man's dreams are evoked ever fresh visions
of life.

A Day in February

OH ! the delight of it, the swift throb of bliss,
Yesterday Winter, and then a day as this :
With never a cloud in the blue stretch of sky,
With thrushes sweet singing in all the trees nigh.

Trunks of the beeches are silver a-gleam
In flood of the sunlight, as light on a stream ;
Elm boughs shine ruddy from dull brown and grey,
Except for their bareness it well might be May.

Hills in the distance lie purple and blue,
With mists in the valley beneath every hue,
Caught by the magic of sunlight and kiss't
From soft grey and lilac to deep amethyst.

Oh ! the delight of it, joy of the sun,
What if bleak Winter his course hath not run ?
This day is given us, ours to enjoy,
Laugh in its gladness, let no cares annoy.
Oh ! the delight of it, the swift throb of bliss,
The next day to Winter, to be a day as this !

Spirit of Spring

SPIRIT of Spring ! re-kindle me
With quickened life, as plant and tree :
While bough and branch to blossom break,
My sleeping senses stir awake.
With rain and shadow, sunlight, dew,
Thine ancient meshes weave a-new ;
And closer, in my very blood,
Thine essence pour in such a flood
To make me one, as plant and tree
With earth's replenished energy.

Longing

OH ! how the heart awakes and cries
At Spring's ineffable surprise,
Calls out in quenchless ache and pain,
For what no heart may well attain.

Through the long, sombre winter days,
I tread Life's passionless, drear ways :
Think quiet thoughts, serene and still,
That vaguely please without a thrill.

But when the first sweet breaths of Spring
Among the woods go whispering,
When thrushes call from tree to tree,
Some old deep sorrow stirs in me :

I am a-thirst for unseen things,
I yearn for vision, weep for wings :
Against Life's bars, beat all in vain,
For what, I know not . . . save its pain.

In Hospital

NOT Easter lilies wan and sad
Bring me, who lie a country lad:
Beside my pillow here, instead
Set primrose tufts, hazel-buds red,
The yellow catkins light that dance
In every breeze on hazel branch :
For with them will not creep as well
Some sense of Spring, the fresh Earth's smell,
Soft quickening breath of winds that wake
First daffodils in wood and brake ?

I lie and see . . . as in a dream,
That flower army, all a-gleam,
Midst slight green leaves bending to sigh
With every breeze that wanders by.
I see . . . the sky beyond the boughs :
West winds my dormant senses rouse—
Then I awake . . . no longer glad,
Since I lie here, a country lad.

“A May Twilight”

To-NIGHT a sudden glamour caught the street,
Falling athwart its careless London way :
And through the ceaseless throng of passing feet
One felt the May !

Perchance 'twas witchery of twilight glow
'Thrown by the rain-gleam on the passers there,
Some lingering sunset-magic . . . loth to go
From the women's hair !

Sudden ! the crowd who only knew the Spring
There in the bounded city's measured graces,
Bore her sweet mystery of wondering
Upon their faces !

Weary and beautiful, placid, perplexed,
Or eyes as empty as a broken vial . . .
Each for the moment shone serene—unvexed—
Transformed awhile !

The Beech Woods

SOME men in aisles of fretted stone,
Where lighted altars break the gloom,
Lift best their hearts to heaven's high throne,
With chanted psalm and organ boom.

Here in this woodland, aisles of green
On living columns skyward reach,
A holy place of sun-flecked screen,
To me a sanctuary of beech.

The noonday light comes softened down
Through boughs that interlace o'erhead :
Heaven's blue is hid by leafy crown,
Heaven enters in the heart instead.

Mysterious shadows fall and pass ;
With every wind leaves stir beneath,
The sun a moment to the grass
Flashes like sudden sword to sheath.

Some men in aisles of fretted stone
Win nearer heaven . . . others are made
Closer akin to the Unknown
In June beneath the beeches' shade.

The One White Deed

You ask, one white deed have I done,
A single white amid the black
That throng in crowds ? Let memory run
Backward along my life's fierce track.

Aye ! one thing I remember well.
It was the best of all my life.
Father ! it will be hard to tell,
For priests can scarcely know the strife
A man as I met, being young,
Hot-blooded, very quick and strong.
I can feel still how swift there stung
A live, wild fire my veins along
At sight of her : 'twas not her face,
Though face was never like it yet,
Nor her young body's swaying grace,
Nor her sweet voice (and I forget
Its accents only with all things),
Through it there ran a tearful note,
And then a laugh, as a bird sings.
I used to watch her slim white throat
And see the laugh begin there first.
'Twas all of her I loved . . . her youth
Fresh as a bud soon rose to burst :
A white rose—aye ! in very truth
This I let be, her whiteness shine
Without one spot or stain from me.

Think of it ! think ! a life as mine !
Father ! how can I make you see

The miracle it was ? To kiss
Her soft red mouth with lips of fire
I had staked gladly all heaven's bliss :
Or once to touch her. Wild desire
Burned every sense ; till to me came
No other single thought all day
But this, a fierce devouring flame,
That once against my breast she'd stay,
So I might feel her heart on mine
And kiss her small, still childish face
Unto a woman's : break the shrine
Of virgin purity, disgrace
Her sexless peace of childhood fair,
And make her mine, body and soul.
I might have done it. Father ! there
Lies my one deed of merit whole.
Ah ! father, if you knew such men
As I, you would be sure of this,
Somehow a miracle was when
I there denied myself her kiss.

I wonder, should I some day steal
Within that heaven you speak of now,
And choice were given me. Should I kneel
To kiss her robe's hem, her white brow,
Or crush her mouth on mine instead !
And hold her close then, breast to breast ?
Nay ! you rebuke me, nearly dead.
Maybe ! maybe ! you priests know best.
And I would even then endure
(Losing my paradisal bliss)
The old fierce pangs to keep her pure ;
Strengthened to forego her kiss.

To-night

TO-MORROW we'll be wise—to-night instead
Forget to-morrow. Child ! your head
Wears a faint nimbus from the sun's last ray.
And, since a saint but rarely comes my way,
Stir not, dear little saint, but sit and smile,
Letting me talk just aimlessly awhile.

Now that I look again, your drooping face
Owns quite the old painters' air of holy grace,
Making those worldly things, I find not ill,
Drift far and dream-like from this evening still.
It seems incongruous, banal now to say
All I had meant, December and your May.

'Tis true, despite the dear protesting eyes
I bless you for : there the stern fact denies
Our sophistry : for naught may ever span
That gulf between the lost years of a man
And such as yours, a white, unwritten page
For youth to pen, not dreary middle-age.

They tangled things, somehow, the sisters three
Who wove the fates constraining you and me.
Will they, I wonder, credit too, someday,
My speech of truth, here, in this barren way,
Shewing you just how ugly, yet how sure,
'The barrier between us must endure ?

Move not ! I want to keep you pictured thus
(For this must mean the end of all, for us),

I want to see you in remembrance there
With misty ring of sunset round your hair,
Tremulous mouth and eyes of honest grey
That always keep their childhood's direct way.

Child ! you will have your worshippers and flowers
Later, among the glad young future's hours,
Roses enough, I see them, heap on heap ;
Perhaps this spoiled rose cost more giving, keep
It. No ! forget ! you must forget !

Not tears ? Not shrinèd saint with eyelids wet ?
To-morrow I'll be wise, and my life dead
As wisdom's Solomon—instead
Forgive me, fates ! this sudden comfort whereto I
 am led—
 To-night.

Priscilla

(1840)

THE preacher took his text o'erhead.
I heard Priscilla's laugh instead,
So low, I'm sure none other heard
The little note, as flute of bird,
That slightly stirred the tucker lace
About her throat, faint flushed her face,
And drew her lips to rosier bow,
In way, Priscillas only know !

I, through the dreary sermon's while,
Watched the vague flicker of her smile,
That crept from eyes to lips' refrain
Then lips to eyes swift back again.
Black-mittened hands lay in her lap
Devoutly still . . . if it might hap
Along the cushion'd seat, I prayed,
For a brief instant one be laid !
But no ! with fingers intertwined,
Priscilla's hands were most unkind.

The little curls about her neck
Had lights of gold and just a fleck
She always called "an auburn red,"
"Carrots" her younger brother said ;
Against one ear, a straying lock
Just teased my patience, while the clock,
Over the gallery, solemn ticked,
As through his prosy sermon picked

Our prosy parson his slow way.
She wore a posy, sweet and gay,
In her high-waisted gown, the twin
Of one beneath her bonnet's brim.
Is't any wonder I'd to look
At her, as parson at his book ?

Thirddies and fourthlies, on he droned
In long procession, I had groaned,
With eyes upon Priscilla's face
For the delayed dismissal's grace,
When, by a flower touch so light,
Impatience swift was put to flight,
For fingers, soft as thistledown
On the red cushion pressed mine own :
Just at that moment lastly preached
The tiresome parson : end was reached
Too soon !

Together

WE passed across the moor together,
You and I, in the golden weather
Of early autumn : down below
The little, curling mists did go
About the nestling homesteads there.
But, on the upland, clear and fair,
The sunlight rested ; on your face
Lingering with some vague, mystic grace
I knew not hitherto, touched mien
And voice to dignity serene.

Unconsciously we both withdrew,
E'en thought, from that we surely knew
Whereto our loitering steps must tend,
And days together forever end.
You plucked a blossom from the down,
With steady fingers in your gown
Fastened secure. I, watching, guessed
How afterward it would lie pressed
Between some secret page : my heart
Like fashion there, would rest apart
From what comes after ; at your smile
I forced another ; laughed awhile
At some quaint recollection, capped
Your foolish fables with one apt,
We both grew children over, too.

Yet, all the time, I strove with you
In secret farewell . . . only jest
Withheld or we there, breast to breast,

Had mocked the sunlight, spoiled the day
Life yielded grandly ; separate way
At last we tread : yet, once together
We, in the golden October weather
Went o'er the fading, purple heather—
You and I.

A Rift

You will come no more,
And I shall never send :
You being you, I—I
Until the end.

Despite this I am yet
No less your friend ;
While you, I know, keep mine
Until the end.

Life fashions strangely thus,
Starts flaws she will not mend ;
Nor will not wholly break
Until the end.

The Happy Valley

'TwiXT the moorland and the sea
Of all places I would be ;
Where a little valley hides,
Where the singing of the tides
Falls in echo sweetly faint
With the sea's eternal plaint.
Overhead the great crags sheer
Skyward climb : their shadows here
Make a shelter from the sun
While his blinding course is run.

On the springy turf I'd lie,
Watch the fierce, unclouded sky,
See the waves of heated air
Quiver, eddying everywhere :
Hear the seabirds' haunting cry
As they swoop, wheel and flash by :
Smell the wild thyme 'neath my head,
Bruised to sweetness for a bed.
Let the world without go by,
Peace enwrappèd would I lie.

But alas ! comes not for me,
'TwiXT the moorland and the sea,
That deep valley, save in gleams
Fitfully, about my dreams.
Yet I have it none the less,
Though no more my footsteps press

That soft turf, I hear the breath
Of the distant sea that saith
“Peace dwells in thee.” Tired soul
By that voice is sudden whole.

Here, among the city's throng,
Sings the sea her low, wise song ;
'Stead of countless passers-by,
I discern the wide, far sky,
Blue, intense above the crags.
When my inmost spirit flags,
Comes a vision of the vale—
Then no more, I weakling fail ;
Blows the breath of Life to me
From betwixt the moor and sea.

Amsterdam

TALL houses grim that overlook
Your own reflections, year by year,
In quiet waters there below
Where only shadows seem to stir :
Old houses with steep-gabled roofs,
Where ancient dates stay carved on high,
What secrets an ye'd only try—
Ye might relate the passer-by !

Once had ye mistress such an one,
As Rembrandt, Hals, or Maes set
On canvas for ourselves to know,
As though in life we met her yet ;
A lady wise, serene and firm,
Ruling her household as her spouse
His merchant ways with kindness, though
Fear tinged affection in her house ?
Within your walls how many a feast,
With flowing cup and generous fare,
Welcomed as guests the faces we
Gaze on across the gallery there !
Here portly burgomaster stepped,
Clanging yon lion-headed bell,
There rich-gowned vrow in ample skirt,
If ye their passage might but tell !

Old houses grim that overlook
Your own reflections, year by year,

In quiet waters there below
Where only shadows seem to stir,
What secrets an ye'd only try—
Ye might relate the passer-by !

Dordrecht

VENICE—men call her in their pride
Of winding waterways o'erset
By houses, bridges, where the tide
Doubles rose glories of sunset ;
Where trembling azure, silver, gold,
In vague reflections come and go,
From every surface that may hold
The western skies' mysterious glow.

With sunset ended, as a spark
Colour extinguished, shadows soft
Steal o'er the tender summer dark.
Great ships with single lights aloft
To guide them seawards at the mast,
White sails shine ghostly, hulks in row,
Pass towed in line ; toward the vast,
Out on a sunset tide all go.

A northern Venice, girt around
With silent waters, mast on mast ;
And in their midst, an ancient crown,
Her great tower rises, from the past
To front the present ; ever turns
To watch the tall ships out to sea,
And eastward evermore discerns
The tall ships anchor at the quay.

"City of Dream"

FAERY city, whose palaces gleam over the rippling,
moving stream,
Venice men name you, I—city of dream !
Opal, amber, mother-of-pearl, from each unto each
do your half-tones whirl,
Fleeting, inconstant, as moods of a girl.
You quivering flash, then, an instant burn to rose-
red richness, and fading turn
Pale purple and lilac a new key to learn.
Tremulous light ever comes, ever goes, when twi-
light vagueness her magic throws,
All city of dream then—amethystine and rose.

Which is the Venice that holds men most—the day-
light palaces host upon host,
Or this phantom city, her daylight ghost ?
When shadowy waters now hide, now reveal, beauty
and radiance, and hushed we feel
Elfin spells o'er the senses steal ?
Glide we silently by with the stream ; gondola,
waters, reflections, seem
With ourselves but part of a wondrous dream.
Then Venice at last I truly see, no mortal city, but
builded for me
Not of marble rare but pure mystery.

Venice

THE waters lap low,
As we go, as we go,
Toward the lagoon
'Neath the young crescent moon.

Dim palaces shew,
As we go, as we go,
Marble lintel, façade
In the evening's soft shade.

The western skies low
As we go, as we go,
Hold sunset's last flush,
Rose, lilac and blush.

All is peace : and I know
As we go, as we go,
That the heart of heaven's bliss,
Would be just again this.

The Boboli Gardens

We left the pictures with our eyes
A little wearied of their gold
And purple glories, azure dyes,
And richest crimsons, fold on fold.

Past altar-pieces, dim with Time,
Blackened of incense smoke, we went,
By courtesans, a motley line
Of saints and sinners, oddly blent.

Stood grave tall ilex overhead,
Along the garden's sunny ways.
We roamed oppressed with those old dead,
Haunted by thought of other days :

Until, we stepped where Florence lies
All beauty, framed in living green,
Where 'neath the blue Italian skies
Giotto's immortal tower is seen.

Far white-peaked mountains dimly die
Against the furthest stretch of blue ;
Soothed by that far expanse of sky,
The greatest Artist . . . then, we knew.

At Villa D'Este

THERE are ghosts that flit,
As here in the sun I sit
Looking out over the terrace wall
At fountains below and cypress tall,
At groves of olive and thickets of rose,
Planted how long ago, who knows ?

Within they stir not ; those echoing halls
With gaudy mould'ring frescoed walls
And marbled stairways hold no ghosts ;
But here, in the garden, they throng in hosts.

In and out of the green arcades
Among the tangle of sylvan glades,
A many-coloured troop they pass
Lightly over the dew-wet grass.
Courtiers, poets, musicians and clowns,
Ladies in gorgeous Renaissance gowns,
In shimmer of silk with jewels a-gleam ;
Laughing, rich-clad the shadows stream,
Sunlit, brilliant, careless and gay,
Living again in their blithe array.

I sit and dream in the noonday sun,
Living again in a day that is done ;
If of human life a single day
May be said to die while its memories stay.

Keats' Grave

“ So sweet a spot in love with death
Would make a mortal,” poet saith,
Who, 'mid the grasses yonder lies,
With English roses round and skies
Blue as none English there above,
“ So sweet a spot with death in love.”

The nameless, deathless poet near
By Shelley sleeps ; the birds sing clear
As though they loved to sing and knew
The dust below a singer's too.

Oh ! passionate heart and brain a-flame,
“ Whom the gods love ” a double fame
Of death and genius yours to reap.
What if the cypresses watch keep
Beside a nameless tomb ? No need
For any pilgrim name to read—
Since long immortal in the blue
Have soared your deathless song and you.

ROME, *April*, 1908.

Chiaroscuro

MYSTERIOUS gift, our human Life
Of peace and struggle, joy and strife,
Of careless laughter, bitter tears,
High leaping courage, craven fears,
Of changing dreams, and swift desires,
Dark moods of torpor, flaming fires
That light the spirit, spur the brain
To life's best efforts, fiercest pain.
And none e'er knoweth, nor may know,
But dimly of another's woe,
Nor utmost pinnacle of bliss.
Each heart's tremendous secret this,
Making of Life a path of light,
Or pilgrimage of blackest night.

Sonnet

OH ! restless human heart that as the sea
Swings and recedes in ceaseless ebb and flow,
Though sighing wind or wilder tempest blow,
Ever thou movest 'neath complainingly :
And if thou seem'st to rest, can only be
Illusion for a summer hour to know,
Since surging fathoms, there, the blue below
An errant wind may lash to enmity.

Yet on thy tides what ships to port are borne !
Rich-cargoed, rare, from stranger lands afar,
Weathering the wrack, by beating surges torn,
To pass and harbour there, within the bar ;
While thine unquiet voice by night and morn
Moans in eternal quest 'neath sun or star.

The Game

It's no use stopping to wail when the game is half-
way through,

Dropping the spoiled laurels to snatch at a sprig of
rue.

Play for your life with a spirit, play, for one never
can say

The psychological moment, that leads to, or up
from, dismay.

Try and forget the spectators tier upon tier behind,
They who will clap if you conquer, hiss if your
fate's unkind.

There are others who strive beside you, men for the
selfsame stake,

The tag of a ribbon's colour, a cup, or an honour's
sake.

Bruised and beaten, or hero, cheered, lifted
shoulder-high,

Smiling bareheaded to all the crowd, or creeping
unnoticed by ;

After all there's the man unchanged, somebody
knows him yet ;

And one who remembers is apt to be worth a dozen
of those who forget.

Time enough to be sorry when the game is over and
done

And a man has finished for all he is worth, there, in
the noonday sun.

To a Stone Figure Found in an Egyptian Tomb

Who wrought thee long ago, beside the Nile,
Setting in stone thy slow, archaic smile :
Closing the coffin-lid in gathering gloom,
On thee, a thousand years hid in the tomb?

Was he a youth, that swathèd, mummied clay,
Or some old Rameses wearied and grey ;
Did quivering mouth thy sculptured one caress
In token of the living lips she'd press ?

Tears, unavailing, bitter, o'er thee shed
As thou wast shaped in image of the dead :
Or wild, impelling fear the carver speed
To haste and shut thee close, there, with the deed ?

Thou dost not answer, only smile and smile
As when they fashioned thee, beside the Nile ;
And, when these lips are voiceless as thine own,
Still thou wilt smile inscrutable in stone.

Summer Storm

ALL night the wind against the pane
Moaning cried and lashed the rain ;
All night the heart within my breast
As the wind could never rest.

Then tempest died and morning sun
Garden colours vivid spun ;
Yet all along the garden walks
Lay sodden roses torn from stalks ;

Red roses trodden, spoiled, forlorn,
From fair sweet sisters ruthless torn ;
As in the heart lie, trampled low,
Passionate dreams Life may not know.

“ Poppy-Land ”

ALL the summers that are dead
Seem to flame again, awhile,
In these poppy fields of red
All the summers seem to smile.

Colour, as a banner spread
O'er the waste lands, mile on mile,
Blazes, riots, poppy-led,
All the summers seem to smile.

All the summers that are dead
Wake to fire in this defile,
Lifting from the dust their head,
All the summers seem to smile.

Moorland

O'ER the sombre moor they crowd
Shadows of the flying cloud,
Circling, wheeling, swift away
Through the silent, livelong day.

Giant boulders, hoary, grim
Climb the heights skyline to rim :
Purple heather round their stones
All the colour moorland owns.

Mile on mile stretch open moor,
Granite greyness, lonely tor,
Where but shadows move and pass,
Fleet, mysterious o'er the grass.

Watching . . . shadows, moorland, seem
Types of man's unceasing dream
By man's thought the secret mind
Of all living things to find :
Thoughts are flying shadows thrown
O'er the height of that Unknown
Which, untrodden, 'gainst the skies
There in greatness ever lies.

Dartmoor

HERE the winds rove fresh and pure,
Sweeping spaces stretch away ;
Nothing little may endure,
Life's no more a petty day.

Room is for man's spirit here,
Underneath this wide, far sky ;
Room for thought to wing, grow clear,
Room for weariness to die.

All is beauty free and fair,
Joy instinctive floods the soul.
Glowing earth, wind-freshened air,
Make the sorest spirit whole.

This the gift of Mother Earth
To her children, sought above
On her lonely heights, have birth
Wondrous springs of power and love.

A Sin

(The Legend of St. Darlugdach, A.D. 526)

DEAR was Saint Darlugdach to abbess good Saint
Bride.

Young and fair and white as snow
They two did long abide,
Blessed abbess, nun devout, known all the country-
side.

White was the habit of Saint Darlugdach the fair,
But whiter yet the sweet young brow
Beneath her chestnut hair ;
To hide it all within a veil her effort and despair.

Red was the mouth, as a rose's heart in June,
That told her beads and sung her chants,
God wot they went in tune !
Saint Darlugdach's but holy thoughts, eve, morning,
and broad noon.

And every night she lay at rest against the Abbess'
breast,
For of the company of nuns,
St. Bride did love her best ;
Full tenderly she cherished her, a dove within her
nest.

White was the habit of Saint Darlugdach the fair,
And white her soul, God knew it so,
Until her eyes met there,
Man's eyes beyond the cloister wall, they seemed to
burn the air.

They drew the heart from out her breast, her
fluttering heart aflame,
And all her womanhood up-burst
At sound of her own name
On wooing lips, the single word, . . . then never
Life the same !

She knelt before the altar steps, she told her beads,
she sped
To scourge her tender flesh, and yet
She felt no pain, instead
She smiled and scourged again until the very stones
ran red.

She heard one voice between her chants, from
matins to compline.
It sang not canticle nor psalm.
It drowned the Mass divine.
“ Can there be sin in Christendom, Mother of God,
as mine ? ”

That voice now called her from her prayers, her
soul from Mary's feet,
She shuddered and obeyed its thrall,
“ Mother ! that sin be sweet ! ”
She moaned and prayed, then straight arose, and
went the voice to meet.

“To-night, Oh, Darlugdach !” it said, “this very
night I come
To bear thee hence, my prisoned dove.”
Her tense, red lips were dumb,
Her eyes were sudden brands that burnt, of her
young life the sum.

He kissed her brow, he kissed her breast ; her mouth
he dared not kiss,
Though for its touch, he was but man,
He would have risked heaven’s bliss ;
“Not yet,” she whispered as he yearned toward her,
“Nay ! not this.”

That night she lay her down beside St. Bridget wise
and good.
Her fingers clasped a crucifix,
They seemed to burn the rood,
Her breast was flame, although she lay immovable
as wood.

Without was darkness of the pit, in torrents beat
the rain,
The wind cried like a human voice,
Yet could not drown her pain.
She heard before it came love’s call “Darlugdach !”
then again.

Loud called that voice amid the storm, and louder
her own heart.
She trembling rose, “He waits, I go !”
Sudden awake did start,
Her slumbering faith, her vows, and shame, passion
was rent apart.

She cast her down upon her knees, praying as ne'er
before,
'Gainst her own heart, 'gainst her own flesh,
Ah ! agony right sore,
While in her ears that yearning voice " Dar-lugd-
ach ! " o'er and o'er.

" My love ! sweet love, ah ! come to me. Here in
the storm, I wait,"
Wailed lover's voice ; she steeled her heart,
" Dear love ! The hour grows late."
Into the fire where great logs burned she thrust her
bare feet straight.

She kept her white feet, each by each, there in the
fire's fierce core,
The tender, living flesh to sear.
Ah ! pain in mad pain more,
That with love's pain did fight and fight, until it
overbore.

The voice without grew low and faint, until at
length it died.
Tortured, exhausted, then at last
She crept against St. Bride,
With scarrèd feet and wounded soul to lay her down
beside.

Morning in moving magic broke o'er Kildare hills
at last,
Darlugdach turned from pearl and rose ;
Since yester-dawn what vast
Soul-tracks of anguish hers to tread—all life seemed
overpass'd.

Saint Bridget healed the feet, forgave her little nun
with tears.

There came no other sin to spot

Darlugdach through the years.

In all the chronicles but this one frailty appears.

But, sometimes, when her prayers were said, all told
her latest bead,

Deep memory in her breast would leap ;

Upon her knees she'd plead :

“ O, Mary mother ! which was sin ? Yea, verily,
indeed

Are vows by children made to Christ, by women
made to men,

More holy in the sight of God ?

Was I unfaithful when

Unspoken vows I broke, and sent a soul to darkness
then ? ”

.

Into the night her lover passed ; the years let fall
their veil.

Before, behind him all is dark,

Vanished from legend's pale,

Save for his passion, fierce and foiled, of which is
told this tale.

Summer Night

“When I scan the multitudinous circling spirals of the stars no longer do I touch earth with my feet, but sit with Zeus himself and take my fill of the ambrosial food of the gods.”—PTOLEMÆUS (Mackail’s trans.).

MORTAL are we beneath the sky who scan
‘This empyrean arch, a blazing span
Of star and planet, burning overhead
In steady glow ? Nay, do we feel instead
One with the gods, as Ptolemæus saith,
Immortal, unafraid of life and death.
Earth’s little day sinks down and utter dies
Before the awful vista of these skies :
Man and his race seem pigmies out of sight
Under these countless arcs of dazzling light :
Time, but a toy for children’s make-believe,
History, the web that busy spiders weave,
Fever and fret subside and fall away :
With the high gods we are serene as they.

In Devon Now

THE apple trees in orchard land
With ruddy fruit, well-loaded stand :
Ripe apples fall from off the bough—
In Devon now.

Against the white-washed cottage wall
The many sunflowers, straight and tall,
Lift golden cups, the reddest rose
In Devon blows.

The heather's fading on the hills,
But Autumn's mellow sunlight fills
The brackens full as they can hold
Of Devon gold.

Oh ! western land beside the sea,
Where'er I wander still to me
Come thoughts of orchard, fruit and bough
In Devon now.

Moorward

IF I were in heaven
I'd want to come back
Once again to Devon
Toward a moorland track,
Where the purple heather
Colours all the wold,
In this Autumn weather
Brackens turning gold.

Where are shadows creeping
From the clouds o'erhead,
Now as softly sleeping,
Then as pixy led ;
There, with silence resting,
Paradise would be :
End of fret and questing,
Mother Earth, with thee.

A Countryman's Creed

PASSON he saith to me, passon he do,
As the years of man upon airth be few,
Packed full o' trouble, gude passon saith,
And the way o' life's to prepare fer death.
I reckon he knaweth deal more'n me
In bukes and sich, where larnin' do be.
I never worn't no scholard at all,
And as fer schulin', why, my dear sawl !
Me darter's littlest maid do knaw
More o' schulin'n ever I saw.

When passon talketh along o' me,
Somehow or t'other I can't agree.
I holds as life be gude in the main,
For winter, zummer, the sun arter rain.
A course there's a passel o' things to bear,
A mort o' losses, a plenty o' care
For folks to bring up their chillern strong,
Brave young tackers, a purty gude throng.

But, come to look at it all way round,
Countin' right wi' wrong, wi' rotten the sound,
I've always reckoned and always should
As the scale do most-times tip fer gude.
Let passon tache as a man in his prime,
Lusty and strong, should use of his time
In thinkin' o' death, wi' life runnin' quick.
Nay ! but I'll never agree wi' thic.

Passon he holdeth, young passon he do,
As the years o' men upon airth be few.
I'm eighty-six, to his twenty-nine,
'They bain't so scanty, they years o' mine.
I haves me laugh, and I sits in the sun,
A-smoking me pipe, while years as be done,
Go past in me mim'ry, gude old days,
I dawn't care what thic young passon says,
Life's man's concarn, when death do end,
Maybe he too shall come as friend.

A Country Fair

I MIND I was courtin' Loveday Lee,
Purty a maid as ever you see,
Wi' rosy cheeks and a skin like milk,
Hair as yaller as fine-spun silk.
I minds it all as 'twas yesterday,
Axin' her whether 'twas yea or nay.
The maiden coloured and dropped her head
As if 'twas a suddint question I'd said,
While all the time I was mortal sure
As I'd never need for to axe her more.

'Twas August, the week o' Kirton Fair.
I zees it all as I still was there
Wance agen, and Loveday too
Dressed out in her Zinday frock o' blue.
Brave and proud of her gown was she
And a-gwine off to Fair along o' me.
Fairs in my youth was grand, ees, vay !
Nort be a quarter as gude to-day.
Crowds o' folks decked out in their best
All dringed up in the streets, a press
'Twas, fer a body to get along dro
Wi' Loveday in her best Zinday blue
On me arm. Dear life ! but worn't I proud
Trapesing along wi' the brave gurt crowd ?
I bought some fairing, quite half a pound,
Pink and white and twisted round
Curly sticks and comfits too,
Almonds, macaroons but few.

What you gets to-day is brave poor trade,
Fairings, as in my youth, bain't made.
High in the swing-boats both of us soared,
Loveday screeched, and the watchers roared
As higher us went, wi' the faces below
Looking like moons there, row 'pon row.
I tried me aim, while Loveday frowned
At the gipsy woman chaffing round,
A handsome critter, though over-bold,
Wi' a scarlet kerchief, an' rings o' gold
At her swarthy ears, and eyes that stirred
The blood in me veins, so I never heard
Her suave, persuasive speech, Loveday
Took me arm and us went away.

'Tis clear in me mind as 'twas yesterday,
Things o' the moment fades away,
Us lives in the Past, old folks, I reckon.
And eyes long closed do smile, hands beckon.
'Tis forty year since my Loveday died
Wi' her last-born baby coffin'd beside.
Yet I often seem as I feel her near,
Wi' her hand in mine, and her laugh so clear.
To-day is a shadow cast by the sun,
But the Past is a day as is never done.



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